

I have a sincere hope that this will be read, but with the current flurry over the airing of "Stolen Honor" this letter might be coming to you as one of thousands on the topic.

I feel it is every citizen's right to not only have a political opinion, but to do everything they can to convince other people of its validity. I also feel that a business should have the same right because politics affects them as powerfully as individuals.

In my opinion however, the actions about to be taken by the Sinclair Broadcast Group in ordering its stations to preempt regular programming just days before the Nov. 2 election to air a film that attacks Sen. John F. Kerry's activism against the Vietnam War cross the line between politics as normal and outright coercion.

The media is always accused of being biased, but in today's world where news and opinion have become a multi-billion dollar industry, getting your news comes with a choice. If a person feels Fox News is too "right wing" or The New York Times is too "left wing" they have the ability to make a decision on where to spend their dollar or their viewing time. This brings a natural order to opinion and bias in news. If a person holds generally "right wing" opinions they will not be satisfied by reading the New York Times and could instead feel more comfortable watching Fox News. The supply and demand of a free and open market place then forces overall balance or at least the ability for a wide variety of sources to coexist.

This method of choice by a viewer is COMPLETELY CORRUPTED by a conglomerate ordering 62 separate stations with varying network affiliations to air such a politically charged piece. This is not an example of a business or group of people using TV as a forum to express a point of view. Rather, it is someone hijacking the TOOL OF DELIVERY itself to wield undue influence. There is an immeasurable difference between the two. Any and all choice is removed from the equation.

To put it another way, say that a company owned 62 grocery stores under varying names. To compete for the consumer's dollar that company would run the best operation it could and pick a wide variety of products to sell. In this example, those stores don't make the product they are simply the delivery method that consumers use to pick their product. But what if the owners of that company felt a strong attachment to certain brands on its shelves? What if one day the company had all its stores stop stocking shelves and ringing cash registers to make an announcement to their shoppers? "Cheerios have been reported to cause cancer. You should buy wheaties instead." Do you think that would be undue influence? After all, it's not one product attacking another, it's the company that is responsible for providing you the ability to grab either one off the shelf trying to force you to pick the one it likes!

Some people might say that if the company owns the store then they can do whatever they want. Customers can just pick different stores. Maybe, maybe not. If nothing else I'm sure Cheerios would have a heck of a lawsuit.

Either way, broadcast television is different. It is not right that a company can use its leasing of PUBLICLY SUBSIDIZED and PUBLICALLY OWNED airwaves to in effect force a political opinion down the throat of the public that's footing their bill. This isn't NBC or Fox picking a story to run. It's the very people that are bringing their signal into our houses picking and choosing what shows up.

It's like your mailman opening your mail and changing things around before he delivers it to you. Even after you pick which magazines you want to read the news in, the mailman can change what it says before they get to you.

The FCC shouldn't allow it, that's one of its jobs. The networks should be concerned about what their affiliates are airing in their prime time slots. The advertisers on these stations should spend their dollars elsewhere. Most importantly people should be angry they are being taken advantage of.

Sincerely,

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